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## News - local - general news

### Positive outlook, growth and future

Wednesday, 21 January  
2004

A community update  
from Willmott  
Forests

AS we start 2004, we reflect on what has been a positive and eventful year for the Bombala region. Through the acquisition of the two softwood timber mills located in Bombala, to the ongoing expansion of the local softwood plantation resource, and subsequent increase to Willmott Forests employment, Willmott Forests has again shown its long term commitment to Bombala, surrounding towns and the softwood timber industry.

Never before in our 23 year local history have we been more prevalent than now as a topic for general conversation within the community. Sometimes the information is accurate and warranted, other times not. However we understand that if we are to build Willmott Forests in concert with the planned and much needed expansion of the Bombala region we recognise a need to continue to strive for a close relationship with the community. We believe the best way to achieve this is to ensure important and accurate information is available for those wanting to know the facts, and that the community can easily access this information.

A couple of avenues currently exist for those within the community wanting factual information. Obviously the one we prefer is through direct face to face contact. The location of our Forestry Operations office in Delegate and our Processing office in Bombala are well known and we encourage anyone who wishes to talk to us to drop in.

In the interim, we have put together this article to address current events and near-future plans.

Processing Operations:

The period since July 2003 has been a busy one



The period since July 2003 has been a busy one for Willmott Forests in developing its wood processing capability in Bombala. The sawmill at Bright Street was restarted and its activities linked to the newly acquired Prime Pine landscape and treatment operation at Sandy Lane.

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for Willmott Forests in developing our wood processing capability in Bombala. The sawmill at Bright Street was restarted and its activities linked to the newly acquired Prime Pine landscape and treatment operation at Sandy Lane. We encountered several problems at the Bright Street sawmill namely, insufficient control over dimensional tolerances in cutting and absence of planning approvals for normal use of the kiln and dry mill facilities. While we addressed these issues, we decided, as an interim measure, to work the sawmill mainly as a feeder to the treatment operation (making mainly sleepers and palings), which is not a very productive way to run the mill, however, whilst awaiting approvals it is certainly a way of keeping staff employed. We also processed logs at a slower rate than initially planned. Despite these obstacles and operational restrictions we have a functioning sawmill, with 15 new full-time jobs. At least 5 new additional jobs are to be advertised within the coming weeks once the dry mill is operational. The dry mill facility is very important to the viability of the mill in Bombala and will allow the mill to value-add locally and become profitable.

We have taken steps in three areas to improve the operation of the sawmill:

1. Modifications to the chipper-canter: A major upgrade to the controls and set-out has occurred whilst further improvements will be made during the first part of 2004. A new scanner, computer controls, and log sensing and positioning will lead to more accurate cant sizes, with fewer passes required, better recovery rates and efficiency.
2. Kiln use: We have worked closely with Windsor (the kiln manufacturer) and outside consultants to address issues about noise and emissions. Some physical changes were made to reduce noise, including better insulation, replacement of seals and the addition of sound deflection barriers. Past problems with emission smells we think were predominately caused by un-burnt LPG escaping through a cracked ceramic tile in the combustion chamber, this has since been repaired. Based on testing done in late November 2003, in close consultation with nearby residents, council and the EPA, we are hopeful of receiving approvals soon to allow normal use of the kiln.
3. Planer use: The Bright Street site had a planer for many years until the early 1990s, when it was shut down. A new planer was installed in 2001 and was operated until the previous business closed in July 2002, although there were some concerns about noise and dust, especially wood shavings. The position about permitted use of the planer is not clear.

We are currently working to restricted operating hours each day. We have addressed the main concerns - the new planer is fully enclosed and the older, noisy open aired machine has been de-commissioned and removed. Plastic linings have been allocated into the chain pulling shavings to reduce clanging, a new system for removing shavings is in place, and we have bought a fire truck from council to assist in dust suppression. This, together with the help of an experienced planer operator, we expect to move to full, normal operating hours during the first part of 2004.

As these changes are implemented, the product mix at Bright Street will shift to mostly structural sawn timber with much of it treated at Sandy Lane. Log throughput will more than double to at least 35,000 cubic metres per year; and as highlighted above we will need at least an extra 5 crew for dry milling and at the green chain. Further investment in additional drying and treating capacity is also being considered which may also deliver further new jobs in this area of the business.

Willmott Forests is the largest employer in the Bombala region with over 100 staff. We remain committed to the full development of the region's forestry potential.

Activities on the forestry front have also been busy throughout 2003.

#### Forestry Operations:

##### Fires

For much of the 2002/03 summer our Willmott Forests Forest Industry Fire Brigade "FIB" worked alongside all other fire agencies in battle with the worst fires seen in many decades. Willmott FIB formed part of the CFA Strike Team that went into the Slaughterhouse Creek fires in December 2002. From mid January to the end of February 2003, Willmott FIB was continuously engaged in the joint DSE/CFA campaign in and around the Tubbut Valley, protecting life and property along with support at the Delegate Airbase. Also during this time, Willmott Forests in association with the RFS Bombala Fire Control Centre, attended to the construction of a number of emergency fire trails in and around Delegate Township. Most pleasing from these activities was the successful protection of these communities assets and the regions plantations.

##### Planting Season

2003 saw the planting of some 1.5 million radiata pine trees. The treestock was sourced from nurseries in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, including local Bombala nursery provider Monaro Native Tree Nursery. Most significantly amongst these were some

250,000 containerised treestock. Container stock has an advantage over open-root stock in dry conditions as they suffer less transplant shock, which in turn ensures a higher survival rate.

During winter 2004 we will be planting 2.7 - 3.0 million trees, 1.0 million of which will be container stock. This increased program has necessitated the engagement of additional contractors and purchase of additional plantation site preparation equipment.

Research trials

Our ongoing commitment to refined chemical usage in plantations continues, this is being undertaken in association with the University of Melbourne and the chemical industry.

New trials were established to monitor the impact of treestock type and establishment spacing on the development of new plantations. Our research of the interaction between genetics, nursery techniques and planting density assists us in maximizing plantation productivity. These trials have been designed to be replicated over all new Willmott Forests plantations for several years to come.

Also commenced during 2003 has been a trial to monitor uptake of the trace element Boron on basaltic soils. Boron deficiency in soils can cause deformity and loss of productive wood within pine trees.

All of these trials have an ongoing long-term commitment from Willmott Forests and are vital in maximizing the wood yield from local plantations.

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